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ABSTRACT

The idea of year-round education (YRE) is not a new one. As early as 1912 there are records of YRE programs implemented in communities. As a result of the increasing enrollment in schools and the overcrowding many classrooms are experiencing, YRE has become an attractive alternative to the traditional 9-month schedule. Air conditioning costs and outdoor heat are always issues when the subject of YRE is mentioned. Separate funds for installing air conditioning or different summer and winter hours are both considered viable solutions to climate problems. There are numerous single-track and multiple-track systems that can be used in conjunction with a YRE program. Whenever an alternative to the traditional school system arises, both pros and cons of the idea surface. There are numerous pros to YRE: (1) enhancing learning; (2) giving teachers and students a refreshed and motivated feeling after returning from breaks; (3) reducing discipline problems; (4) bettering student and teacher attendance; and (5) reducing teacher stress. Those opposing the YRE system point out that schedules for siblings in different grades may be different and that change is difficult. (KDP)

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YRE BASICS: HISTORY, METHODS, CONCERNS, FUTURE

by Don Glines

The credit for the first true current concept year-round education program is usually given to Bluffton, IN, 1904, though some even cite the beginning of the "summer vacation schools" in 1870. Still others acknowledge that urban schools in the U.S. in 1840 operated 240 - 250 days. Though few students attended that total, schools were open. Contrarily, the rural schools were functional only three to six months because of weather, transportation, and farm and ranch priorities.

The records of the early 1900s document programs in a variety of communities, including Newark, New Jersey (1912); Aliquippa (1928), and Ambridge (1931), Pennsylvania; Nashville, Tennessee (1925); Omaha, Nebraska (1924); and Minot, North Dakota (1917). They were begun for many reasons: Newark to help immigrants learn English and to enable students to accelerate; Bluffton to improve curriculum and learning, provide family and student options, and create additional classrooms: Aliquippa and Ambridge for space; Omaha to offer continuous vocational training programs; Nashville to improve the quality of education; and Minot to meet the needs of the "laggards," all valid pieces of the puzzle. For various reasons, the many early adoptions did not survive the depression of the late 1930s, and the national uniformity needed during World War II. The concept was reactivated in 1968-69-70 in communities in Missouri, Illinois, California, and Minnesota. The 1980/90s resurgence, initially primarily mechanical calendar adoptions to generate space, is now giving indication of becoming a major step toward the projected eventual 24-hour lifelong 21st Century learning society.

The small explosion occurring in the growth of year-round education approaching the mid-90s offers credence to the fact that a national transition is beginning to occur in regard to school calendars. In concert with new facilities, YRE is a perfect match, especially in states with dynamic and changing populations and a shortage of money. California, Texas, Florida, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado are among the examples. In California, with 2.0 million more students projected to enroll during the remaining nineties, bringing the total to 6.8 million in the public schools by 2000, building construction will continue to be one of the highest priorities. Added to this is the fact that 55 percent of the existing schools need replacing or major retrofitting. Nationally, multiply these figures with states the size of Texas and Florida -- not to mention the programs in Utah and Nevada -- and the national costs over a 10-year period become staggering.

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Increasing numbers of communities are realizing that it no longer seems sensible to utilize billions of dollars worth of facilities only three-fourths of the months of the year, one-half of the days, and one-fourth of each day. Through creative calendar planning, space is now being increased by 25, 33, or 50 percent, depending upon the selected configuration. Innovative secondary schools, in some situations, can expand a site by 100 percent. A few space-desperate districts have considered two shift year-round programs. Enrollment is the driving force, but there is growing acceptance of the education, employment, and lifestyle benefits of YRE. States such as North Carolina, non-growth districts in California, and approximately 50 percent of all new national programs are adopting the single track format, which saves no space or money, but does offer many personal and educational advantages. Additionally, modified calendars for specific regional needs are becoming popular, as in Yosemite Park, where school vacations are during the off-peak seasons in November and March.

Though 26 states have schools with 12-month calendars, California is the national leader. For 1993-94, over 200 districts will offer some form of YRE, a dramatic growth over what existed just one year ago. If current trends continue, the majority of the 7,000 plus schools may be on, or considering, some form of a continuous calendar within the next several years. For 1993 alone, in 177 communities, there were 1,523 YRE sites: 1,166 elementary; 147 middle junior high; 58 high school; 13 continuation high; and 127 other alternative housing configurations. These facilities enrolled approximately 1,315,679 students. The figures do not include independent study centers; year-round learning programs conducted by county offices of education; the many juvenile court schools that are in session for 12 months; other county-directed special education, community, and vocational school opportunities; the growing number of adult, pre-school, and private schools that offer year-round enrollment; or the extended year programs, which add more days to the school calendar, and though related, do not fit the existing YRE definitions.

High schools have been slow to join to join the movement, but the crowded conditions which are now reaching the secondary level are creating implementation plans in a number of states. It apparently will just be a matter of time. In several districts, there are increases in single track high schools to accommodate the elementary calendars and create educational opportunities year-round. It is no longer just large urban and suburban districts which are encompassing YRE. Smaller units, communities, and towns are adopting, too. A rural school built for 300 is just as overcrowded, usually from city migration, at 450, as is a large site of 2,000 when it reaches its overflow capacity. With all the new students, affected small districts do not have the money to keep pace with construction needs, and most

do not have enough land at their existing sites for more portables. But small schools also benefit from the more continuous learning advantages of a single track.

Since the re-introduction of year-round education in 1968, most YRE communities have tried to offer the option for families of either the nine-month or year-round calendar. Choice has long been and still is the preferable way to implement the concept. However, as more and more districts reach the saturation point, and as financing becomes less and less available, an increasing number are turning totally year-round. Boards are now realizing that with space shortage, requiring YRE is no different than the policy of mandating a September to June calendar. Either way, some constituents are going to be inconvenienced. The nine-month calendar has for years been "wrong" for perhaps a majority of the working families. To create a win/win environment where different factions can be served, districts have modeled a plan where each school in the community offers a choice of either 12 or 9 months - a two-calendars-within-a-school plan. Now, as voluntarily more are selecting year-round, and as the region grows, increasingly the sites are converting entirely to YRE. However, the original format offers the best of all worlds where it is feasible. North Carolina began 18 districts with school-within-school options.

In moving toward year-round, air conditioning and outdoor heat have become issues in many communities. To respond, states are making efforts to provide a/c funds for warm climate schools which adopt multi-track programs. Beyond that, pioneers are encouraging the consideration of summer and winter hours. If during the winter period the school operates from 9-3, the summer hours may be from 7-12:30, with reduced snack and passing periods. On most days, the rooms are not too hot until midday; physical education programs can be conducted in the morning hours. With such a schedule, the students have the afternoon free to stay out of the sun, swim, study, rest or work. Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, conducted a mandated YRE program from 1928-1938, using "summer hours" before air conditioning; neighboring Ambridge followed the same format from 1931-1937. The Wilson School in Mankato, Minnesota, from 1968 to 1977 used this same plan. American schools in "always hot" countries as in the Caribbean Islands, where the buildings have only grille for windows, follow this plan every September to June. Those that have tried this approach have found it generally successful. Even after air conditioning is installed, there is consideration for staying on summer/winter schedules, as people often adapt and find they prefer early morning school in the hot season.

Year-round does create space, and saves a growing state billions of dollars in construction - and in over construction - should a decline in enrollment occur in the early part of the 21st Century. On a three-track calendar plan,

a school designed for 600 will hold 900, without portables; on a four-track arrangement, the same site holds 800; and on a five-track configuration, 720. Districts would then need build only 2 or 3, 3 or 4, or 4 or 5 projected schools. Multiplied by every facility and district in a state, the savings in land, utilities, insurance, construction, maintenance, and staff are of tremendously significant proportions. Fiscal experts are indicating that educators no longer have the luxury of funding empty school buildings for three months.

When planning YRE, youth serving agencies (Scouts, YMCAs), parks and recreation, police, churches/Bible schools, camping directors, child care providers, business managers, industrial employers, and, of course, all classified and certificated staff -- not to forget students, parents, boards, and universities -- must be included; they are all affected. Back to school sales are held in June; Bible schools operate 12 months; basketball, swimming and art programs are needed during the day in January; police need to know that students will be in stores at 10:00 a.m. in October; year-round day care is essential.

Hospitals, businesses, and industries cannot remain solvent with idle facilities and equipment -- and neither can schools. The added costs of air conditioning, 12-month support staff, limited extended teacher contracts, and altered maintenance programs do not compete with the savings in buildings, busses, textbooks, desks, landscaping, insurance, and other such factors, according to the studies conducted to date. The Educational Cooperative of the University of California at Riverside has engaged in a major study to verify or refute these findings of the past 20 years of YRE experience.

Calendars can be used for single track (all students in the same group -- all vacationing together), with intersessions for education and lifestyle benefits, or they can be multiple track to assist with the shortage of space. The most popular to date are illustrated in their multiple track form; they follow the same number of days for single track, but have only one group rather than the three to five necessary to increase enrollment capacity; modified formats can be tailored for specific communities:

Concept 6: This is a one hundred sixty-three day calendar (or 180 with overlap days), divided into six terms of approximately 41 days each. Students in three groups (A, B, C) attend two consecutive blocks, or 16 weeks, followed by eight weeks of vacation. As this is a three-track calendar, when A and B are in school, C is on vacation; therefore, a high school built for 2,400 will house 3,600. It is popular at the secondary level, though is also used in the elementary grades.

Modified Concept 6: The same calendar as Concept 6, except the units are divided into four weeks. Thus a student attends eight weeks, followed by four weeks of vacation. Popular at the elementary level, a school of 250 will house 375, or one of 800 will comfortably hold 1,200; some districts use the modified form for K-6 and the original form for 7-12.

60-20: A four-track (A, B, C, D groups) calendar where students attend three 60-day instructional blocks broken by three 20-day vacations. Popular at the elementary and middle school levels, this plan houses 33 percent more students; thus a facility constructed for 450 provides for 600. It also works for high schools, as will all calendars.

45-15: The same four-track as the 60-20, except students attend four 45-day periods, interspersed with four 15-day vacations/intersessions. Popular at the elementary level, it has been successfully used in the secondary schools. A site built for 750 will seat 1,000 or one for 2,100 will shelter 2,800.

90-30: Basically the same four-track plan as the 60-20 and 45-15, except students attend 90 days followed by a 30-day vacation. It is especially popular at the secondary level, but also is used at the elementary; a school of 1,500 can house 2,000.

30-10: Another four-track variation of the 90-30, where students attend 30 days and have ten off. This revolving door is repeated six times for each track to equal 180 days of school and 60 of vacation. A facility built for 400 will house 520.

60-15: Students attend 60 days followed by 15 days off-track. This provides a popular common three-week vacation for all students and staff. The disadvantage for some districts is that the 60-15 is a five-track plan (A, B, C, D, E groups), thus increasing the space by only 25 percent, or a school of 600 to 720, rather than 800 or 900, as in four or three-track calendars.

Orchard: A five-track 60-15 calendar is featured, as in the regular 60-15. However, in this plan, rather than rotate groups of 30 students with their teacher (the entire track class goes on vacation in most configurations), 20 percent of each classroom on each track go on a three-week vacation. A teacher may have 35 students assigned, but only 28 at one time -- and only 28 desks and books. The teacher retains his or her own room, teaches 225 days, receives commensurate pay, and still has eight weeks of vacation days. The students rotate in and out in groups of seven each, or 1/5 of any class size, thus increasing space by 25 percent. Four California districts operate this unique program; it was first developed in Utah.

Flexible All Year: This plan requires placing curriculum in smaller unit packages; usually a single track, it can save space by individually tailored vacations, so that approximately the same percentage is always out of school during each September to June, and in school June to September. It matters not when or for how long the family is away, as long as the space, staff, and student combinations match. Students finish the unit packages and begin new ones when they return -- or continue the "package." It can be used in any school, but is particularly suited to continuation, alternative, and magnet schools.

Personalized Continuous Year: Developed at the Mankato State University Wilson Campus School, this is similar to the Flexible all year, but instead of "packaging," curriculum is completely personalized and individualized. School is open 240 days; students may plug in or out anytime as desired; they create their own vacations. Like the Flexible All Year, it was originally designed for single track, but works well as a multiple track in the same manner as the Flex; vacations are scheduled through a "voluntary/mandatory" format when space is essential.

Four Quarter: The curriculum is divided into four 12-week blocks (fall, winter, spring, summer); students attend three of the four. On a mandated basis, this is a four-track system, saving 33 percent space, as in the other four-group configurations. It was once the original and most popular K-12 calendar and is still considered by districts, especially at the secondary level. A site built for 3,000 can hold 4,000 or a smaller one for 900 can accommodate 1,200. In a voluntary extended year form, it is being modeled in Buena Vista, Virginia.

Quinmester: This is another five-track system. The curriculum is divided into five nine-week blocks of time. Students attend four of the five quins. It is preferred by the secondary level, but can serve the elementary, too. It saves only 25 percent; thus a facility for 1,500 will increase to 1,875. It was one of the early calendars and pioneered in Florida.

Concept 8: The curriculum is placed into eight six-week blocks of time. Students attend any six of the eight to complete their 36 weeks, thereby providing two six-week vacation periods. By balancing the terms, schools can save 33 percent space, as this becomes another style of a four-track calendar. Constructed for 1,800, the site grows to 2,400. It has been used at the K-12 levels in California. Concepts 12 and 16 are variations: 12 four-week blocks, or 16 3-week blocks, each equal the same 48 weeks.

25-5: Generally used for single track situations and more often in alternative programs, it can be used for multiple track. Students attend blocks of 25 days each to reach 175 -- and do five additional days through variations in the calendar or independent study. The 25-10 is another variation of the plan.

There are others - the 45-10, 30-5, 50-5, 50-10 which are variations of the 45-15, 30-10, or extended year or calendars customized for a specific program or community - but the ones outlined currently are most commonly used or discussed.

Schools in a district, or in a "feeder system," may use the same calendar, or two different ones, or even three or four. Though often desirable, a single calendar is not necessary. If the elementary staff greatly prefers one, and the secondary another, or if some elementary schools prefer Calendar X, some Y, and some Z, most combinations will match. There are several keys: (1) each needs to end by June 30 -- or the end of the common fiscal year, so that students transferring can do so at the beginning of the next; (2) the calendar must "overlap" in a manner that ensures that families with elementary, middle, and high school children can have a block of common vacation time; (3) the bussing routes must be able to be satisfied; and (4) the central office staffs must be able to live with the diversity of different delivery and attendance accounting periods.

Though most districts are committing to solve space and finance problems, more continue to offer YRE because of its non-space benefits. Even if facilities and funding are a major concern, educators are learning to help convince the communities toward a calendar change by highlighting the other advantages for the majority of residents. Once accustomed to the multiple vacation plans, growing numbers prefer to stay on them, if given a choice, for the reasons of continuous learning, employment realities, lifestyle diversities, enhancing facilities, improving curriculum, expanding community options, people considerations, and personal choices.

There are common pros and cons which always are the center of debates when YRE is introduced to communities: PROS -- enhances learning; teachers and students return from breaks refreshed and motivated; reduces discipline problems; better student and teacher attendance; reduces teacher stress; provides time for student enrichment classes during intersessions; allows families to take vacations during other seasons and when vacation destinations are less crowded; allows children more time to spend with parents while siblings are in school; eases overcrowding and makes better use of facilities in multitrack schools; parents with seasonal jobs, or in the military, can choose a calendar that allows more time for the family to be together; day care is sometimes easier to arrange when fewer children are

out of school; teachers can work in their profession year-round by substituting in schools with different calendars; medical appointments can be scheduled during breaks. CONS -- change is difficult; parents must arrange day care during fall and spring breaks; there may be different schedules for elementary children and their older siblings; children of teachers might attend a school on a different calendar; in-service days for teachers are harder to schedule; working on an advanced degree during the summer can be difficult for teachers; summer vacation is shorter; getting students to study during summer might be difficult; teachers with other summer jobs might object to the change; administrators and clerical staff in multitrack schools are often overworked; communication with parents is more difficult in multitrack schools; families might not get their first choice for the preferred calendar; students in multitrack schools will miss some school events.

Educators, including the leading year-round advocates, are still learning how to improve the programs. There are a number of sources to assist beginners, the first and foremost being contact with the veteran districts that have been on YRE for 10-20 years. They are willing to share their knowledge and experience and should be visited. Most have found that the best way to begin is to start early, small (but yet a critical mass), and on a voluntary basis, to learn the mechanics before a space crisis arrives or attempting to mandate it. In the meantime, this approach provides optional voluntary calendar choices for parents. However, several communities have successfully chosen to go "all at once" and adopt it districtwide. Both approaches will work, if carefully planned and humanely communicated and implemented with the public.

The need for new facilities is real, but districts are learning that YRE can be an excellent ally. Though first piloted in 1904, and used extensively the past 20 years, the concept is still in its infancy, when viewed from the year 2000. Most of the current methods will become obsolete; they are only transitions to the next decade. Future-oriented educational planners believe the nine-month calendar will become an instrument of the psst when the people truly understand the facility, finance, education, employment, and lifestyle benefits of year-round education.

What does the future hold? Year-round education will expand. Most districts will begin by establishing more traditional calendars such as the 45-15 or 60-20. However, moving toward the year 2000, more will transition to flexible all-year and personalized continuous calendars, such as the one developed at the Wilson Campus School. But beyond, a new dawning will eventually occur, as communities consider such possibilities as those designed for the Minnesota Experimental City -- 250,000 residents with no schools -- and the city as the living learning laboratory.

In the coming systems, learning will be lifelong. It will occur everywhere, for many learn on their own. Everyone will be important, regardless of how much they know, and authority will be shared by all. Education will truly be a continuous process and will be tailored to finally really meet individual needs. People can and will make decisions about what and how they should learn. They will form positive social networks on their own without formal schooling; they will create choices.

In the 21st Century, YRE will be dramatically different. Such absolute time arrangements as Concept 6 or the 60-15 will disappear. If technologists can place astronauts on Mars by 2015, then certainly educators can create far better continuous learning systems in the next 20 years. It is time to do the impossible; the possible is no longer working. The future is bright for year-round education.

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